

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Water Resources Division
Water Rights Bureau

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
For Routine Actions with Limited Environmental Impact

Part I. Proposed Action Description

1. Applicant/Contact name and address: Rosebud Conservation District, PO Box 1200, Forsyth, MT 59327
2. Type of action: Conservation District Application to Change Water Reservation #42KJ 30114735
3. Water source name: Yellowstone River
4. Location affected by project: Sections 17, 20 and 21, T6N, R44E, Rosebud County
5. Narrative summary of the proposed project, purpose, action to be taken, and benefits:
This application is to add a point of diversion to the Rosebud Conservation District Water Reservation water right (42KJ 10005-00). A flow rate of 1.56 CFS (700 GPM) and a maximum volume of 235 AF/YR of the Rosebud CD water reservation will be used for center pivot irrigation on 81.0 acres (8.64 GPM/AC and 2.9 AF/AC). The proposed place of use is south of Interstate Highway 94 approximately 10 miles east of Rosebud, MT and includes 74 AC in NE Section 20, 5 AC in N2NWSE Section 20 and 2 AC in W2SWNW Section 21, T6N, R44E, Rosebud County. The 1.56 CFS will be diverted from the Yellowstone River by pumps that feed the Hathaway Irrigation Association canal in NESESW Section 17, T6N, R44E. The DNRC shall issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.
6. Agencies consulted during preparation of the Environmental Assessment:
(include agencies with overlapping jurisdiction)
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program
Montana Natural Heritage Program
United States Natural Resource Conservation Service
United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Part II. Environmental Review

1. Environmental Impact Checklist:

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

WATER QUANTITY, QUALITY AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quantity – The Yellowstone River below the confluence with the Big Horn River is not listed as chronically or periodically dewatered by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The proposed use will take Conservation District water reserved for irrigation use as planned. The median of the mean flow in the Yellowstone River at the proposed point of diversion is greater than 6,700 CFS in all month within the proposed period of diversion. Diversion of 1.56 CFS flow rate of water reserved for irrigation use will not dewater the Yellowstone River.

Determination: No significant impact

Water quality – The Yellowstone River in Rosebud County is not listed as water quality impaired or threatened by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The only aspect of the river that is noted is the possible effect of diversion dams on aquatic life. Otherwise the river supports other uses. Use of Yellowstone River water for high efficiency center pivot sprinkler irrigation will not alter the water quality. High efficiency irrigation minimizes the potential for return flows that may carry fertilizer or other pollutants

Determination: No significant impact

Groundwater – Irrigation using water from the Yellowstone River has no likely effect on groundwater quality or quantity. Infiltration of irrigation water may locally increase the availability of groundwater.

Determination: No significant impact

DIVERSION WORKS – The diversion works from the Yellowstone River is in place and operational. The project proposes to use the existing Hathaway Irrigation Association pumps and a portion of the existing canal. No modifications to the channel, flow characteristics or riparian areas are predicted. No barriers will be created, no wells drilled or dams emplaced.

Determination: No impact

UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

Endangered and threatened species – According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program, there are 7 animal species of concern and one plant species of concern in the proposed project area. The animal species are the Black-tailed Prairie Dog, the Spiny Softshell, the Blue Sucker, the Sturgeon Chub, the Paddlefish, the Sauger and the Pallid Sturgeon. The plant species is the Persistent-sepal Yellow-cress. The proposed project involves no work in or near the river because the diversion works are in place. The habitat is currently agricultural land and would not change. No barriers to migration or movement of any species are predicted. The installation of pipelines to the proposed pivots is the only proposed disturbance and is also entirely within currently agricultural land. A portion of the proposed project lies within Sage Grouse habitat as mapped by the Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program. The project is consistent

with the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy according to a letter from Carolyn Sime, Program Manager, dated January 5, 2018.

Determination: No significant impact

Wetlands – There are no wetlands in the proposed project area.

Determination: No impact

Ponds – There are no pond in the project area and no ponds are proposed.

Determination: No Impact

GEOLOGY/SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE – Mapping by the United States Natural Resources Conservation Service shows that the dominant soils in the area are loam or silty clay loam. Yamacall loam is the highest percentage of the project area and is a well-drained non-saline to slightly saline soil. Saline seep is unlike and no alteration of soil stability or quality is predicted from irrigation.

Determination: No significant impact

VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY/NOXIOUS WEEDS – Existing vegetative cover is agriculture. Irrigation would improve the quality and quantity of existing cover. Installation of pipelines and pivots provides an opportunity for the establishment or spread of noxious weeds. It will be the responsibility of the land owner to monitor and control noxious weeds.

Determination: No significant impact

AIR QUALITY – Irrigation of existing agricultural ground has not potential to adversely affect air quality.

Determination: No impact

HISTORICAL AND ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES – The proposed project is not located on State or Federal Lands.

Determination: Not Applicable

DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY – No additional demands on environmental resources not discussed above are recognized.

Determination: No significant impact

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS – There are no known locally adopted environmental plans or goals.

Determination: Not Applicable

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES – The proposed project is currently roadless agricultural land removed from any recreational or wilderness areas. No access to recreational or wilderness areas exists at present and none is proposed.

Determination: No impact

HUMAN HEALTH – Irrigation of existing agricultural land has no potential to adversely affect human health.

Determination: No impact

PRIVATE PROPERTY - *Assess whether there are any government regulatory impacts on private property rights.*

Yes___ No X___ If yes, analyze any alternatives considered that could reduce, minimize, or eliminate the regulation of private property rights.

Determination: No impact

OTHER HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES - *For routine actions of limited environmental impact, the following may be addressed in a checklist fashion.*

Impacts on:

- (a) Cultural uniqueness and diversity? No significant impact
- (b) Local and state tax base and tax revenues? No significant impact
- (c) Existing land uses? No significant impact
- (d) Quantity and distribution of employment? No significant impact
- (e) Distribution and density of population and housing? No significant impact
- (f) Demands for government services? No significant impact
- (g) Industrial and commercial activity? No significant impact
- (h) Utilities? No significant impact
- (i) Transportation? No significant impact
- (j) Safety? No significant impact

(k) Other appropriate social and economic circumstances? No significant impact

2. Secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical environment and human population:

Secondary Impacts: No secondary impacts are recognized.

Cumulative Impacts: No cumulative impacts are recognized.

3. Describe any mitigation/stipulation measures: None

4. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action, including the no action alternative, if an alternative is reasonably available and prudent to consider: The only reasonable alternative to the proposed project is the no-action alternative. The no-action alternative prevents the land owner from utilizing his agricultural land to full potential and prevents the Conservation District from fulfilling their goal of utilizing reserved water for irrigation. The no-action alternative does not prevent or mitigate any significant environmental impacts.

PART III. Conclusion

1. Preferred Alternative: Issue a change authorization if an applicant proves the criteria in 85-2-402 MCA are met.

2 Comments and Responses: None

3. Finding:
Yes___ No X Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action: This environmental assessment found no significant environmental impacts likely to occur from the proposed project and is therefore the appropriate level of analysis.

Name of person(s) responsible for preparation of EA:

Name: Mark Elison

Title: Deputy Regional Manager

Date: 12/6/2017